French columns to the right and left of his position, which was to be the center. On a level battle-field the solid brick or stone walls of a village, of a churchyard, or of great farm-courts like those of Lombardy, afford the most desirable shelter, and oftentimes, as at Marengo, Aspern, and even Waterloo, the loss or gain of such a position turns the tide of battle; for an army equipped with flint-lock muskets and small unrifled field-pieces, though victorious in the open, dares not leave a considerable portion of their enemy thus ensconced in the rear. Hence the ever-recurring and enormous importance of farmsteads and hamlets in the Napoleonic battle-fields. Lannes was to deploy on the right, and Murat was sent with his cavalry in part to support the forming line, and in part to prevent a flank movement along the slow, willow-bordered current of the Bormida. If Desaix could come up in time, he would form the left; in the mean time the younger Kellermann was stationed with his dragoons to guard Victor's open flank.

The first attacks of the Austrians were repulsed, but with loss and difficulty. At ten in the morning Ott came up, and attacked Lannes's flank. The fighting grew ever hotter and more desperate, and the news from Desaix was that it would be four in the afternoon before he could arrive. Bonaparte called in his small reserve, under Monnier, to strengthen Lannes; but it was of no avail. By midday the French were driven out of Marengo, their front was broken, and their columns were in full retreat to the eastward toward San Giuliano. The First Consul was in despair, and as a last resource sent in eight hundred of the consular guard. For the first hour of the afternoon the retreat was stayed. But the French were soon outflanked on their left by Austrian cavalry, and again began to with-